

who have come here to attend this fifty-seventh Joint Annual Oyster Convention. As the Governor of the State, and on behalf of all Marylanders, I extend to you a warm welcome. You will, I think, find the surroundings congenial here, for we Marylanders living on the shores of the beautiful and bountiful Chesapeake Bay, consider ourselves pre-eminently seafood conscious.

I was born in Crisfield and have spent all of my life among families who for many generations have earned their livelihood on the water. In such surroundings, I have acquired some knowledge of the problems of watermen and of the seafood industry in general. With such a background, it is only natural that I have a lively interest in seafood, and since I have been Governor I have done as much as possible to improve the industry in our State.

The history of the shellfish industry in Maryland and Virginia goes back more than a century and a half. Huge piles of shells found on our shore lines indicate that, long before that, oysters comprised a substantial part of the food supply of the American Indian population. As early as 1825, oysters were taken from the Chesapeake Bay to New England to be planted along the southern coast of that region. In fact, it may be stated that oysters from Maryland and Virginia, schooner load after schooner load plying their way from our waters northward, replenished the beds of Rhode Island and Connecticut. It is said, also, that the industry in Delaware owes much to brood stock from the Chesapeake.

The Chesapeake Bay has achieved a reputation for being the richest oyster producing body of water in the world. Available records of the period indicate that in the 1880's the production of oysters reached an annual total of 12 to 15 million bushels. Sadly, we have here in Maryland witnessed over the past several years a decline in the production of oysters. But through a concerted effort to accelerate seed growing and shell planting, this decline has been halted and a gradual increase in the yield is indicated. We hope, and we think we have reason to expect that the oyster production in Maryland waters will continue to increase over the years.

I have had an opportunity to examine the program you have outlined for the annual joint oyster meeting, and I am certain that these sessions will be profitable for all of us who are interested in boosting the seafood industry. Maryland is grateful to the many scientists, industrial leaders and public officials who have come here to discuss some of the problems of the oyster industry.